

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to provide suggested guidelines for members of the Frida Icelandic Riding Club (FIRC) when organizing and when participating in trail rides. The FIRC would like to encourage members to organize rides for club members in the different regions of the club's five-state area. The FIRC also encourages members to invite club members to join rides sponsored by riding organizations in their areas. The FIRC wants rides to be as enjoyable and as safe as possible for club members. The guidelines suggest ways to accomplish this.

## **Planning**

If you wish to organize a trail ride for club members, the FIRC suggests that you:

- Select an area containing trails suitable for a ride.
- Ensure that riders will be able to use the trails by coordinating as necessary with public authorities or with private owners.
- Ride the trail along with one or two potential assistant ride leaders to ensure that the trail is open and free of hazards and that you and other leaders know the trail. (The leaders also should ride the trail shortly before a ride to make sure nothing has changed.)
- Ensure that there are places to park horse trailers.
- Check to see if watering points are available.
- For rides sponsored by other clubs, check with the organizers to see if they are willing to include FIRC members.
- Propose the ride to the FIRC Events Committee at "directors@firc.us." The ride will be placed in the calendar on the club website "www.firc.us" either as a FIRC-sponsored event or as a member-sponsored event.

After coordination with the Events Committee, notify the membership of the ride by sending an e-mail note to "membership@firc.us." The note should contain the date and time of the ride, the location, the need to bring a negative Coggins for each horse, directions to the assembly point, and the point-of-contact. The notification also should include the anticipated length of the ride in hours and the pace of the ride. It should indicate if riders will divide into different groups. The FIRC recommends that groups be formed according to the desires of the riders and the capabilities of riders and their horses. If, however, a member wishes to sponsor a ride that will be mostly fast tölting and cantering for several hours or more, the notification should state clearly that the ride is for experienced riders able to ride at those gaits and for horses that are in excellent condition.

If you see a ride on the club calendar or receive an e-mail note about it and you want to participate and believe you are capable of doing so, please send a note to the contact person as soon as you can to put your name on the ride list, and indicate in which group you would like to

be. Waiting until the last minute to join the ride makes the task of the organizer more difficult. The ride leader needs to know who is coming in case the ride is cancelled or the parking location is changed.

Members should ensure that they have a negative Coggins for the horse they plan to ride that has been taken within one year of event. It is not fair to the organizer to put him or her in the position of refusing you entry to the event because you forgot your Coggins. It would be a good idea to have plenty of copies of the Coggins and carry them in your truck, in your wallet/purse, in your tote box, and in your saddlebag/fanny pack. It also would be wise to arrange for a farrier to see your horse prior to the event as necessary. A lost shoe could ruin a ride for the rider. Check that your tack is in good condition. Broken or forgotten tack can stop your ride before it begins. If possible, it always is a good idea to have extra tack in your trailer such as a bridle, stirrup leathers, girth, etc. Ensure your truck and trailer are in good working order, and that you have been working with your horse on any loading problems. Bring any medication you may need such as that needed to prevent reactions to insect bites.

## **Assembly Area**

Riders should arrive at the assembly area in time to be ready to ride at the designated time, which means knowing the directions (good directions or a map are essential) and estimating the time to trailer there (add additional time for the unexpected.) It is better to arrive too early than be late and then rush to tack up. This frequently results in stressing you and your horse and in delaying the ride. Riding is supposed to be fun. Please park your trailer in a designated area. Parking in a wet field could tear up the ground. Please do not leave manure, hay, or trash in parking lots. Please take them with you when you leave and not dump them in woods near a parking lot. For this you will need to bring a muck bucket or bag and a fork.

At the assembly area, the ride leader and participants should discuss the pace, length, and route of the ride as described in the ride announcement, plus any other instructions. If possible, the ride leader should distribute maps of the trail, even if they are hand drawn. The ride leader should check to see that all horses have negative Coggins and collect liability waiver forms (sample attached). Riders should divide into groups as described in the ride announcement. For example, riders who wish to tölt and canter should go in one group. Those who wish to walk and tölt should go in a second group. A walk-only group also could be formed if requested and if a ride leader is available. Riders should be candid with themselves and not join a group that will go faster or longer than they or their horses can handle. Riders who place themselves in the wrong group can have an uncomfortable ride and spoil the ride for the rest of their group.

Everyone in a group should know if there is a green horse (or rider), kicker, or stallion in their group and ride accordingly. If you think you will have a specific problem such as crossing water, tell the ride leader and group members before the ride so they can help you through it. It is no fun to be left behind on a frantic horse who is convinced everyone is deserting him.

## **Equipment**

Go out on the ride with the right equipment such as a safety helmet, long pants, and hard-soled shoes or boots. Some riders like to take a halter and lead rope. They can be placed in a saddle bag. It is a good idea to put identification on the bridle and on the saddle. Tags available from pet stores or luggage tags work well. If you part company, you would like whoever finds your horse to have a number that they can call. Carry a fanny pack or wear one of those fisherman's vests with lots of pockets to carry your cell phone, first aid items, hoof pick, water, knife, etc. Some of these could be placed in saddle bags, but keep items on you that you would need if you come off and your horse bolts. You should consider an Easy Boot or Old Mac in case your horse loses a shoe or Vet Wrap and duct tape to make an emergency shoe for short distances. Other items could include frozen water in thermal saddle bags, sponges to cool a horse, extra fly spray, and treats. Leaders could bring a first aid kit (including Neosporin, benadryl, tweezers, string, and duct tape), hoof pick, clipper, and folding trail saw for trimming branches.

## **The Ride**

### **Groups.**

For reasons of safety, groups should go at the speed of the slowest rider or horse in the group. If necessary some riders or the group should be prepared to turn back if a horse becomes disabled. This could be because of such things as injury, exhaustion, overheating, broken tack, lameness, or loss of a shoe. On the other hand, riders should not ask a group to turn back merely because they are tired or sore. If the ride is supposed to be two hours and you are getting tired, be prepared to go the distance. If you have never ridden for two hours, or three, or four, a group ride is not the time to find out if you or your horse can ride that far (or fast, etc.) Riders who do have to return to the assembly point and are not familiar with the trail, however, should not be abandoned and asked to find their way back. At least one rider who knows the trail should go with them. If necessary, the group should turn back. Disabled riders also could wait by the trail for the group to return.

If the riders go out as one group, perhaps because there is only one ride leader, and some riders wish to mainly walk with some töltling, the group should go at the preferred pace of the slower horses. Alternatively, riders who wish to go faster could go ahead, if this does not bother the other horses, get out of sight, and then fast tölt or canter. Those riders then should wait for the slower riders to come up or ride back to meet them.

### **Horses.**

The "perfect" trail horse will go in front, in the middle, and at the end of the line with no fuss. You can keep him under control at all times, which means no tailgating and no lagging behind. Lagging behind means constantly trotting/töltling/cantering to keep up or making the group wait until you catch up. None is fun in a group situation. If your horse does lag, you still are welcome on the ride, but please join the slowest group. Because the ride has a leader, you usually can not be in front even if your horse walks fast and normally leads trail rides. Although not usually a problem for Icelandics, if your horse ever has kicked, or is irritable when another horse gets too close (it is only a matter of time before he might kick), please put a red ribbon in his tail (or green ribbon for novice horse/rider and yellow for a stallion). Everyone should find his or her

place in line, depending upon the horse's temperament, speed, and so forth. If it is important for your horse to be with his buddy, do not separate them (as long as both riders plan to be in the same group). Neither you nor your horse will enjoy the day.

### **Leaders.**

Ride leaders should count the number of riders in their groups and check regularly to make sure that no one has been left behind. Ride leaders should stop their groups after about 10 minutes and let riders tighten their girths. The leaders' role is to not get lost, to be aware of hazards on the trail and pass that information back down the line, to keep a sense of what is happening behind them, and to go the speed and distance agreed.

### **Riders.**

The riders' roles are to keep control of their horses and to pass information back down the line. Riders should inform ride leaders of any problems by passing the word forward up the line. The leader can not keep checking backward, especially at faster gaits.

Riders should stay on the designated trails and not make shortcuts or switchbacks. This could lead to erosion and eventual trail closures. Please remove obstacles (fallen branches, bottles, trash, etc.) whenever possible. This will keep the trail open and clean and will encourage other riders to stay on the trails. Carry a pair of pruning shears in your pack or in a case on your belt to cut branches to help maintain trails.

Please do not break into a faster gait without first checking with the ride leader and with your fellow riders. When trotting, tölt, or cantering, slow to a walk around blind corners to avoid a head-on collision with bikers, hikers, or other riders. Riders traveling uphill have the right of way over those traveling downhill but use common sense in determining who goes when. Do not let your horse sniff noses with other horses you encounter on the trail or along fence lines. This could result in a brawl and lead to injuries. If you ride past other horses, slow to a walk. It is the polite and safe thing to do.

Ride leaders should know the trail, but riders always should stay alert to where they have been, where they are, and where they are going. Many times you will ride on trails that are marked, either with surveyor tapes, painted colored blazes, painted horseshoes, or nailed-on horseshoes. In general, markers usually are on your right. If you see two markers, it signifies a turn. In the case of painted blazes, if you see the left blaze up higher than the right blaze, it means the trail turns to the left. If you are following markers and you do not see one for awhile, it is possible that your group has missed a turn. Discuss this with the ride leader and if necessary back track to the last marker and start over. If you see a marker that goes through a confusing piece of trail, the group should stop and look for the next marker. Many times riders just keep riding straight because it seems like the natural thing to do.

Riders always are in danger of losing access to trails. This could be caused by wandering off marked trails or tölt, or cantering past hikers, especially if they have children or dogs. Please be sure you are pleasant and courteous to everyone you meet, especially to Park employees. You

are an ambassador for the horse community. What non-horse people think of equestrians could depend upon your behavior and attitude.

## **Lessons Learned**

The FIRC wants to encourage members to plan rides for other club members and for as many riders as possible to participate. The rides are a lot of fun. They let members meet, tölt, and explore new trails. The FIRC wants everyone to be safe and to have uneventful rides. If you have any other ideas about trail riding, please send them to "directors@firc.us" and we will incorporate them in the guidelines. We all have had good and not-so-good experiences on the trail. It is good to learn from others and to pass on lessons we have learned.

Happy Trails!